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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000290

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS KDEM IR TU

SUBJECT: IRAN/ELECTIONS: A TURKISH ELECTION EXPERT SAYS  
AHMADINEJAD REALLY WON

REF: ISTANBUL 198 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Sharon Wiener; Reason 1.5 (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: A Turkish professor who informally observed Iran's June 12 elections told us he believes Ahmadinejad really won a majority of votes. He believed Ahmadinejad's campaign added an additional four million fraudulent votes to pad the margin of victory, but claims Ahmadinejad would have won a first round victory without those extra votes. He urged the USG to accept Ahmadinejad's victory, predicting Ahmadinejad "as a populist leader" will "listen to the 35% of the electorate" (sic) that voted against him, and he urged the USG to find an effective Iranian interlocutor to deal with, suggesting that Turkey "probably" remains willing to help. He said Ahmadinejad wants to appoint hardliner Said Jalili as Foreign Minister, but Jalili is not sure he wants the job. This contact has a long history of observing Iranian elections firsthand and teaching comparative election procedures. He has close connections to the Rafsanjani camp in Iran, including many leading researchers at the pro-Rafsanjani think tank, the Center for Strategic Research (CSR). He says CSR's funding has been cut drastically, many staff were fired, and CSR's leadership has been ordered not to leave Iran. Our contact plans to keep visiting Iran regularly to lecture on comparative politics, but also plans to expand his Iranian contact base away from reformist and pragmatist institutions like Tehran University and CSR towards more conservative universities like Mashhad.

Comment: This contact's expressed views run contrary not only to conventional wisdom, but to his own past assessments of the strength of the pro-Mousavi opposition movement. One factor that may explain his dramatic change in perspective is his admission that he expects to be appointed soon to be a Middle East policy advisor to new Turkish FM Davutoglu. It appears he has already internalized the GOT's talking points on Iran. End comment.

"Ahmadinejad really won"

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¶2. (S) We met July 28 with a political science professor from Istanbul's Isik University (please protect), a long-standing contact with extensive expertise in Iran. Our contact had participated in an informal election observation mission during Iran's June 12 elections, as part of a group of Turkish professors who visited polling stations in Tehran, Kashan, and Qom. That observation mission's detailed findings are available in NEA/IR, which received them from a U.S.-based NGO that funded his efforts. Contrary to some of the official findings of that observation mission, however, this professor told us that he believes Ahmadinejad genuinely won a majority of votes, up to 20 million or so. He assessed that Ahmadinejad's campaign added an additional four million fraudulent votes to pad the margin of victory, but claims Ahmadinejad would have won a first round victory without those extra votes.

¶3. (S) Responding to our surprise, he said that he saw polling stations in south Tehran, Kashan, and Qom, in which "every voter" expressed an intention to vote for Ahmadinejad.

When we noted that the official final vote tally was issued unexpectedly quickly on election night, he said he had seen polling stations where five or more Iranians in a single station were counting votes; extrapolated nationally over 40,000 stations, he assessed that a final vote count could easily have been made in one night. He claims that every station he visited had observers from at least one opposition candidate's campaign present, and none of them had registered complaints of irregularities with the electoral commission representatives present. Overall, he considered the post-election anger and disappointment of voters who voted for opposition candidates to be the result of "unrealistic expectations of an opposition victory, which the foreign press did much to raise." He criticized the western press in particular for focusing on "north Tehran and ignoring the rest of the country."

Time to move on

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¶4. (S) Our contact predicted that the post-election street protests would continue to dwindle and then stop, and chalked up the internal power struggle as "just another chapter" in the decades-old rivalry between Khamenei and Rafsanjani. He urged the USG to accept Ahmadinejad's victory, and said he was hopeful that Ahmadinejad "as a populist leader" will "listen to the 35% of the electorate" (sic) that voted against him, and offer them some conciliation. He said he

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hopes the USG will continue its careful balance of "not interfering in another country's internal affairs" and suggested that this summer offered good timing for resuming an effort to engage the Iranian government. Our contact recommended the USG focus on finding an effective Iranian interlocutor to deal with, adding that Turkey "probably remains willing" to help establish such a channel. Reinforcing the suggestion, he noted that Said Jalili, the hard-line Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, who is close to both Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, "trusts the Turkish government, and listens closely to Foreign Minister Davutoglu." He said Ahmadinejad wants to appoint Jalili as Foreign Minister, but Jalili is not sure he wants that job.

Expediency indeed

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¶5. (S) Our contact has close connections to the Rafsanjani camp in Iran, including many leading researchers at the Expediency Council's think tank, the Center for Strategic Research (CSR). He says CSR's funding has been cut drastically since the elections (including no longer being allowed to seek private funding, including via Rafsanjani's Islamic Azad University bank accounts, formerly a significant source of its funding), as punishment for the CSR's overt support for Mousavi. Many CSR staff have been fired, and CSR's leadership including Hassan Ruhani and Mahmoud Vaezi have been ordered not to leave Iran.

¶6. (S) Our contact plans to continue visiting Iran regularly, to lecture on comparative electoral procedures, but plans to expand his Iranian contact base in Iran away from reformist and pragmatist institutions like Tehran University and CSR, towards more conservative universities like Mashhad, where he plans to give a lecture in August.

Comment

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¶7. (S) The views that this contact expressed to us at this meeting regarding the credibility of Ahmadinejad's election victory run contrary not only to conventional wisdom, but to

our contact's own past assessments of the growing strength of the pro-Mousavi opposition movement and the likelihood of significant vote fraud. One factor that may explain his dramatic change in perspective is his acknowledgment in our meeting that he expects to be appointed soon to be a Middle East policy advisor to new Turkish FM Davutoglu. It appears he has already internalized fully the Turkish government's talking points on Iran. End comment.

WIENER